



Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
Admiral Scott H. Swift
USS Fitzgerald Memorial Service
Yokosuka, Japan
June 27, 2017
As prepared for delivery

Good morning families of the FITZGERALD Seven, FITZGERALD Sailors, their families, shipmates, ladies and gentlemen. We come together with heavy hearts to honor the bravery and heroism exhibited by the officers and crew of USS FITZGERALD. The circumstances that bring us here were nothing we desired, but the crew's response was everything we could hope for.

The loss of seven of America's best and brightest leaves an emptiness within us that compounds our grief. In their passing, there is a piece of us that goes with them, a fitting - albeit painful - tribute to the tight bonds shared among shipmates who have become both friends and family.

Their sacrifice serves as an abrupt reminder of the risks inherent in life at sea that Sailors shoulder each time we bid farewell to friends and family, cast off all lines, shift colors and depart safe harbor. Though steeped in tradition, there is nothing ordinary about what we do every day in the Navy.

While we may appear to be largely alone at sea, especially in times of crisis, fellow shipmates are never far when the sea turns against us. I am grateful for the rapid response and overwhelming support of so many who have come to FITZGERALD's aid during this tragedy: The Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force, the Japanese Coast Guard, the divers who were first to survey the damage, and the Navy family in Yokosuka and around the world. It is apparent that there is a special community here where everyone understands and shares in the depth of commitment and sacrifice of Seventh Fleet Sailors. On behalf of the Pacific Fleet, I thank you for all of your efforts.

Thank you as well to all the Chiefs of Navy's, from the Eastern Pacific to the Indian Ocean who have sent, first messages of support, followed by messages of condolence.

That spirit is represented here this morning by our friends from the northern reaches of the Pacific Fleet, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force, as well as from our most southern patrol areas, the Royal New Zealand Navy.

There is always uncertainty with being a warfighter -- with Sailors, even more so. By the very nature of our duties, we go in harm's way every time we go to sea, sometimes to find ourselves in a dark place, alone as a ship, but together as shipmates, fighting together to save the ship, and in so doing, to save each other.

So we gather here this morning, at this service, as has been done so often in our past 241 years, to memorialize those who paid the ultimate sacrifice to allow us to reflect on who we are as Sailors, and why we are drawn to the sea.

This brings me to the crew of the Fighting Fitz.

None of the crew went to bed that Friday evening knowing what was about to be demanded of them. Many of them had wondered at some point in their Navy service, would they have what it takes to respond in crisis when all thought is driven to two primal emotions; flee, or fight.

The narratives to come cannot, and will not, begin to describe the conditions they awoke to in the earliest hours of that morning. Amidst the shock, the darkness, the cold, the chaos and the intruding sea, crew members arose within seconds to fight the ship, not able to fully understand the circumstances, but knowing full well the consequence of not acting. They chose to fight.

Fight in the dark of night, in spaces being filled with the shadow of death, fighting through what is unimaginable to others, you responded, brave beyond your years; as shipmates; as a crew; just as you had trained and lived; together.

This past December, during the commemoration that marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, I had the privilege to speak with a number of the survivors, who went to bed the night of December 6th, 1941, as everyday Sailors. The next night, as they listened to the traditional IMC evening prayer, followed by "taps, taps, lights out, maintain silence about the decks," they retired as heroes.

Among those heroes, there is a tendency to question being called such. All the Pearl Harbor survivors I have talked to say they were just doing their job. Yesterday, as I walked FITZ and spoke with the crew I heard the same sentiment.

Let me take a moment to set the record straight.

Heroism is defined by how you respond when deep courage is required. It is found when every instinct is telling you to flee, and yet you find it within yourself to stay and fight. Your mettle was tested, and you continued to fight your ship. With your captain injured, you were driven by his spirit, the spirit of leadership, to avert the immediate disaster and continue your extraordinary efforts for over sixteen hours to bring FITZGERALD back to port under her own power, bent but not broken.

We gather here this morning to memorialize the FITZGERALD Seven and your heroic actions, enabling the miracle that more were not lost. Friday night, heroism was a common virtue among the crew of FITZ.

You have continued the proud heritage of the American fighting sailor, showing through your actions that US Navy Sailors have the toughness and tenacity to respond regardless of the challenge faced. You have given worthy tribute to your ship's namesake who, during the Vietnam War, fought to protect those around him at the cost of his own life.

Those of us who serve our nation never know when the call might come for us to stand out as individuals. But if and when that call does come, we will remain inspired by, and be well served to follow, the example of the crew of FITZGERALD.

Our hearts grieve at the high price exacted in defense of our nation, but we remain grateful for the heroism and strength of the FITZGERALD crew. We will emerge stronger for their sacrifice and fighting spirit, reassured in the knowledge that, even in the midst of chaos and calamity, we too will be ready.

In closing, it is fitting to remember that it was honor and selfless service to shipmates and country that walked the decks of the USS FITZGERALD that dark night, in that dark place, on that dark sea.

May God bless the FITZGERALD Seven, their families, the crew and families of USS FITZGERALD.